

# Greatest Sunken Treasure Hunt of the Ages Started Because of U-Boat War

## British and American Wreckers Unite in Reclaiming Many Sunken Vessels and Salving Cargoes

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**PIKERS** all of them! Such is the way in which the treasure hunters of the present classify the Argonauts of old. The Golden Ploce of tradition was the flimsiest pretext for adventure compared with the lure to-day of anywhere from four to five billion dollars worth of property in the shape of sunken ships and their rich cargoes.

The general public does not know it, but the United States Government has recently joined hands with our Allies in the greatest maritime salvage undertaking that has ever been essayed. Experts from this side of the Atlantic have gone to cooperate with men of kindred training in European waters, and the purpose of this collaboration is fundamentally to offset the ravages of the Teuton submarine warfare. And what is more to the point, this union of effort has for its inspiration a record of reclamation that is extremely encouraging, to say the least.

### More Than 7,500,000 Tons Sunk.

According to published data enemy torpedoes and mines have stricken more than 7,500,000 tons of craft from the naval and mercantile fleets of the world since the beginning of the present war. Further, gales, foggy weather and dimmed navigational beacons have caused other maritime losses amounting to hundreds of thousands of tons.

In short, it is probably no exaggeration to say that the sea bed has gathered to it quite 8,000,000 tons of craft in the course of the last three and a half years. This does not take into account the lesser fry, like trawlers, drifters, destroyers, submarines and a numerous array of vessels below 1,600 tons.

While some of the ships that have been sent to the bottom were stricken when travelling in ballast only, the vast majority were lost when laden with valuable cargoes. In normal times a ship's freight is said to be worth as much as the craft herself. Vessels that could be bought or built for \$125 a ton are now bringing \$375 a ton, and commodities of nearly all sorts have increased on an average proportionately. Therefore a fair figure for ocean-going ships and their freight combined is roughly \$500 a ton. At this rate the ocean graveyards have been enriched since August, 1914, by fully \$4,000,000,000 worth of property, and that independently of the vessels that have succumbed through stress of storm and navigational errors.

### Visiting Mayor Gave Hint.

A little while back the Mayor of San Francisco when here in the East gave the first inkling of what is in hand by announcing that the United States and Great Britain were going into the work of refloating ships sunk by submarines on a scale heretofore deemed impracticable. Since then scattered bits of information have confirmed that disclosure and furnished suggestive particulars regarding the problem as a whole. Finally it has leaked out that the British salvors have already done much to discount the destructive tolls exacted by Teuton U-boats and submarine mines.

The insistent demand for ocean-going freighters and the continual cry of "Ships, ships, ships!" have led the man in the street to believe that the only solution of the pressing problem lay in creating anew or greatly expanding existing structural plants. Little heed has been given by the layman to the possibilities offered in the field of maritime salvage, but the need of action in this direction was forced upon the attention of the British in particular months ago, and without any parade they have been effecting an encouraging array of recoveries.

### Raised 210 Vessels.

Last December the news reached this country that British salvors had up to that time succeeded in refloating about 210 vessels, the craft representing an aggregate of quite a million tons. These vessels were either raised from the seabed or dragged from beaches where they had been grounded to save them from foundering. They were then towed into convenient harbors where it was practicable to start their rehabilitation or repair

for the purpose of refitting them for active and vitally necessary service.

Any one familiar with operations of this sort knows that they cannot be carried out without special facilities in the way of wrecking derricks and properly equipped salvage craft. Further, the actual prosecution of the work is of a self-advertising nature, because the rescuing flotilla looms up rather conspicuously at its stations about the wreck. This adds considerably to the peril of the salvors' labors, for the Kaiser's submarine commanders are in no wise disposed to stand by calmly and permit their destroying efforts to be neutralized.

Either the Germans are fully informed of what the British have been doing of late or they have stumbled upon the toiling salvors by accident. In any case it is reported that there has developed something like a concerted offensive on the part of U-boats in an effort to halt these salvage undertakings.

Proof of this is not lacking. As rumor has it, enemy submarines suddenly appeared at two places where ships were in the course of refloating. The U-boats manoeuvred so successfully that two salvage craft in one place and one in the other were torpedoed and sent to the bottom in a single day alongside the very vessels they were preparing to raise.

### Sending Wrecking Flotillas.

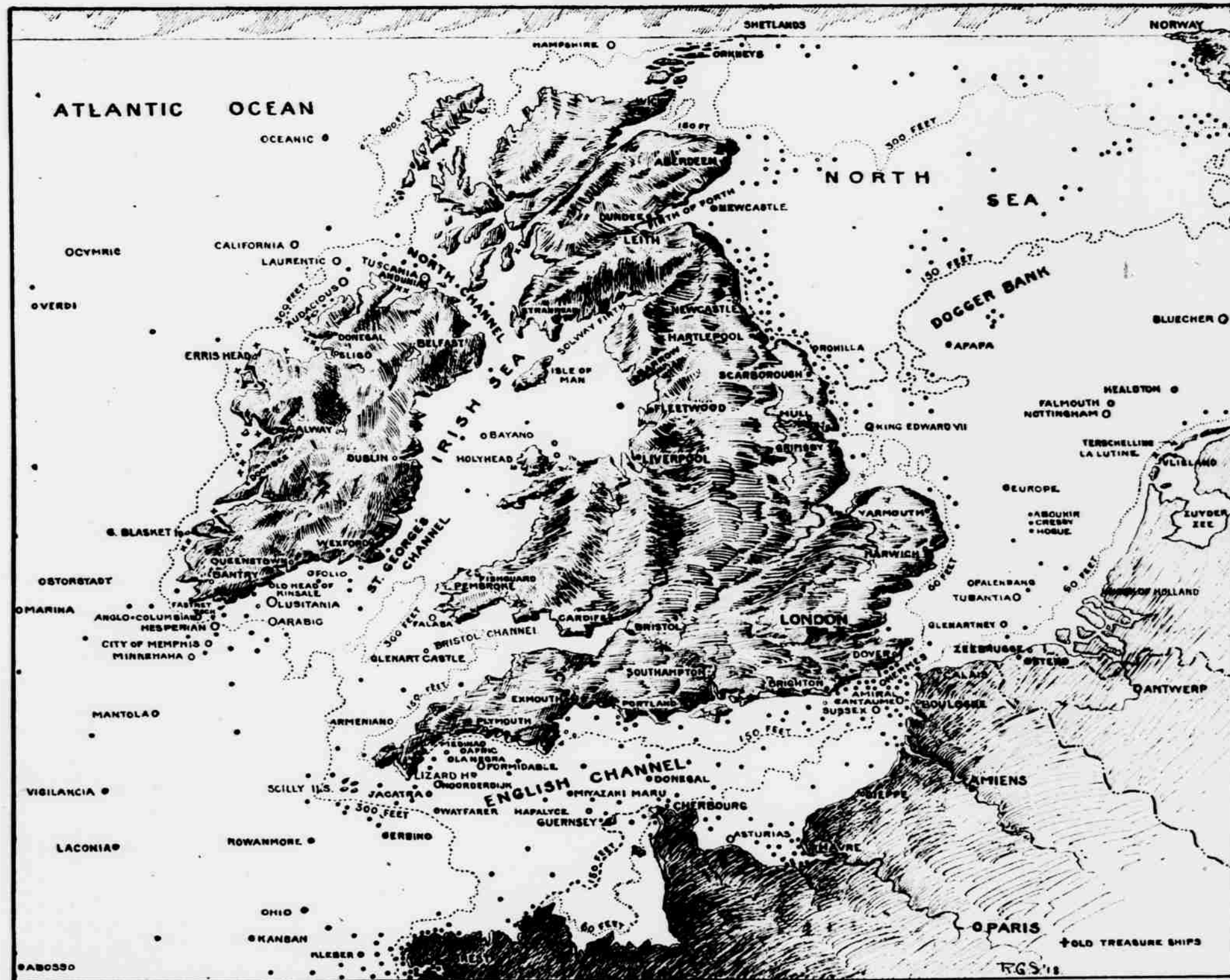
Now we know why the United States has been asked to lend its aid in this work of maritime salvage and also why we have recruited a special corps of wrecking experts and are sending them, as well as salvage flotillas, to Europe as fast as it is possible for us to do so. As the papers have announced, this Government has commandeered the equipment of all of our big wrecking concerns, and to amplify these resources it is not unlikely that numerous craft will be speedily adapted for the work. The present day argonauts are going forth with mechanical facilities at their disposal that will make it possible for them to battle successfully with the formidable opposition of the sea and to break the ocean's grip upon spoils that but a few years back would have been considered utterly irretrievable.

When all is said and credit justly given, the fact remains that American marine salvors have set the pace in this realm of technical endeavor. Americans have broken new ground in the art and have not hesitated to apply or to adapt facilities that have established their worth in other departments of engineering. For a long time our wreckers were content to follow European precedents, but an era making change was inaugurated when the most brilliant of our salvors blazed the way for unique uses of compressed air. Odd as it may seem, those revolutionary essays had for their spur certain lessons learned in driving the first successful tunnel under the Hudson River.

### Diving Tests Made.

Next the Bureau of Construction and Repair and Medicine and Surgery of the United States Navy Department set about conducting a series of deep diving tests, which had for its purpose the breaking away from rather obsolete methods of diving as well as the improvement of diving apparatus. The Government officials had in mind notable work of a similar character done by the British Admiralty back in 1906-1907.

At that time the English demonstrated that it was practicable for a trained man to descend to the then extraordinary depth of 210 feet, do a measure of work and return to the atmosphere without suffering any physical harm. Prior to that such submergence was unthought of and many men lost their lives when descending to depths considerably less. Now, thanks to the experiments carried out by American naval men in 1914, when a depth of 274 feet was reached, we know that a diver can go down more than 300 feet below the surface of the water and do exploratory work, if nothing else, of a valuable kind in aiding salvage operations. Much of the work out out for the international salvage corps is what might be called plain sailing as wrecking goes, because a great many ships are stranded upon beaches or sunk in relatively shallow



Map showing scores and scores of wrecks that may be salvaged or part of their cargoes recovered. Modern vessels are indicated by dots and circles, ancient treasure ships by crosses.

low water and, in numerous cases, sheltered arms of the sea. The salvors will have no trouble whatever in locating these craft, and if undisturbed by U-boats or not seriously hampered by unseasonable weather the summer of 1918 will probably see scores of them refloated and carried where they can be overhauled and made ready for duty again.

In the harbor of Havre alone there are seven big ships that will be taken in hand at an early date. These vessels were caught by German submarines in the early months of the war before the French had built their defensive boom and taken due precautions to safeguard steamships lying in the open roadstead. It is said that there are numerous other places on the coast of France and the shores of the British Isles where the beached wrecks are huddled together in groups.

The map accompanying this article illustrates in a convincing manner the salvage possibilities in the cases of the vessels destroyed by hostile agencies, and it is a matter of record that this display of sunken craft has been extensively amplified by boats that have been lost by going ashore in fog and storm.

The dotted depth contours show in a general way what are the subaqueous conditions confronting the salvors. The outstanding feature of the chart is the very large number of ships lying within the 300 foot depth lines and the scores and scores of others that are resting in much shallower waters. These details are significant, in view of what was accomplished in the case of the U. S. S. F-4.

Of course it must not be assumed off-hand that steamers lying in waters 300 feet or even 150 feet deep can be refloated simply because we were successful in attacking the foundered F-4. That boat was of trifling displacement, 260 tons, and it was possible to drag her progressively into lesser depths, from which she was finally reclaimed. It would be out of the question to deal in a like fashion with

ships of some thousands of tons, deeply submerged, and lying in exposed waters.

However, there would still remain in cases of this sort a chance of recovering treasure and some part of their valuable cargoes. Efforts widely along these lines may reasonably be postponed until after the war, but the potentialities of such undertakings are fairly well indicated by the performances of our naval divers and the earlier exploits of certain commercial divers operating on the other side of the Atlantic.

In the '80s the steamship Alfonso XII, bound from Cadiz to Havana, sank off Point Gando, Grand Canary, in thirty fathoms of water and about a mile off shore. The ship carried newly minted Spanish gold pieces to the value of a half million dollars, and the treasure lay in a strong room beneath the captain's cabin, 160 feet below the surface.

Notwithstanding the fact that the point of operations was right out in the open sea, the specie was recovered in the course of thirteen months, but the diver was afterward a physical wreck simply because he was not handled as an underwater worker would be to-day. The strong room was reached by blasting away the two decks above and thus providing a comparatively easy path of approach for the diver.

Again, \$50,000 in silver bullion was salvaged from the steamship Skyro, which sank in thirty fathoms of water off Cape Finisterre, Spain, in April, 1891. She lay two miles off shore in an exposed position. The diver broke his way to his goal by means of charges of dynamite.

The case of the Peninsular and Oriental liner Oceana, sunk by collision off Beachy Head, England, in March, 1912, is particularly interesting inasmuch as a good many vessels have been sent or carried to the bottom in that neighborhood since the outbreak of war. The Oceana carried at the time of her sinking gold and silver bullion to the value of \$3,860,000, and the divers succeeded in reclaim-

ing all but about \$1,300 of the treasure. They also salvaged \$20,000 worth of ivory.

In the past where conservative salvage facilities have been employed few if any good sized craft have been refloated from totally submerged positions. In the vast majority of instances in which the wreckers have brought the vessels up from their resting places the boats have had a portion of their bodies above water or, if this were not so, they lay in rivers, bays or correspondingly sheltered reaches of the sea, which made it practicable to resort to wrecking pontoons that floated at the surface and were operated in conjunction with the rising and falling tides. To-day the progressive salvor has at his disposal two much more efficient agencies.

Under some circumstances he can apply compressed air within the foundered ship herself and give her sufficient buoyancy to make her rise; or, if this be impracticable, he can employ submergible pontoons—big cylinders of steel. These, when weather and other conditions permit, can be filled with water and sunk directly alongside the submerged craft, and by wire cables or chains passed under the ship or otherwise satisfactorily secured to her, the pontoons can be made to lift her after their water ballast has been forcibly expelled from them through the instrumentality of compressed air fed down the wrecking flotilla.

It is, of course, quite impossible for any one on this side of the Atlantic to say with any degree of certainty what ships may and what vessels cannot be refloated that have gone to the bottom or been beached about the British Isles or along the coast of France. The mere fact that they have sunk in waters within the penetrative limits of the diver, or have grounded fairly near to a populous port, cannot be taken as conclusive that the craft are susceptible of salvaging.

Apart from apparently favorable physical environment, the vessels may be so badly damaged that it would be a waste of precious effort to try to get them off

or to refloat them; and finally, there may be local circumstances that utterly preclude their reclamation. But conditions which prevent refloating do not necessarily estop the recovery of some if not all of the ships' cargoes, and it is quite conceivable that the wreckers may find it well worth their while to secure parts of the machinery and other mechanisms, especially those containing quantities of brass, copper, lead, &c.

Popularly, the opinion is fairly general that a vessel's freight is ruined by submergence, but such is not the case, because some commodities are in themselves virtually imperishable and others, not of this nature, are safeguarded by the manner in which they are packed. A wide variety of metals can remain under water well nigh indefinitely without suffering appreciable or serious deterioration; rubber, coal, cotton in bales, glass and porcelain products, hemp, jute, wool and hides may remain for a long period submerged and yet be serviceable when reclaimed.

Goods packed in glass, earthenware, tin, casks, &c., are thus protected against the action of the sea; and scores of other kinds of merchandise might be specified that are not hurt by going to the bottom with foundering ships. These particulars are given in order that the man in the street may have a broad notion of the opportunities offered the international wreckers to save millions of dollars worth of property, vital to the prosecution of the war, even if it be not possible to refloat the vessels that have gone down with such freight.

As far as our knowledge goes the Lascania lies in water substantially 270 feet deep and no well informed salvor entertains the slightest probability of her raising. However, the ship when she sank had aboard of her copper, brass, gold, &c., to the value of quite a million dollars, aside from jewelry and money carried by her passengers. Further, so it is said, she had in her strong-box some millions of dollars of unregistered securities.

## Work Likely to Continue in Peace Time and New Methods May Recover Billions in Bullion

That ship of tragic ending will no doubt attract the treasure hunters. With dynamite it would probably be possible to break through her hull and reach her cargo and riches, and properly equipped divers should find nothing insuperable in their way unless dangerous currents and the weather block their efforts.

The Parthenon, sunk off Havre, inside the 150 foot depth line, was insured for a total of \$4,000,000—\$1,000,000 for the ship and \$3,000,000 for the cargo. This vessel should offer a tempting case for wreckers bent upon salvaging a good sized ship and extremely valuable freight.

The Miyazaki Maru was sent to the bottom a short distance away from Cherbourg in the English Channel. Some idea of the worth of the craft and freight can be gathered from the fact that they were underwritten for \$3,250,000. The American steamship Hadditon, which was torpedoed off the Dutch coast in water less than 100 feet deep, carried a combined insurance on ship and cargo of \$2,150,000. These instances suffice to give a hint of the riches that now lie on the sea bed because of the present strife and which offer strong inducements for valiant efforts by salvors.

### Craft Valuable Enough Alone.

But quite apart from their valuable cargoes the stricken craft themselves are in hundreds and hundreds of cases warrant enough now for the wreckers to do their best to refloat them or to release them from their perilous positions so that they can be made fit for overseas service again.

An outstanding feature of Teuton U-boat ruthlessness is the large number of particularly big ships that have been sunk in the Mediterranean. The Britannie of 48,000 tons heads the list of sacrificed merchantmen. Then follow, in the order of their sizes, La Provence, 18,400; Franconia, 18,000; Gallia, 15,000; Transylvania, 14,000; Ivernip, 14,000; Athos, 12,640; Royal Edward, 11,117; Cameronia, 10,960; Yasaka Maru, 10,932; Dante Alighieri, 9,750; Mooltan, 9,720; Aragon, 9,580; Mongolia, 9,500; Stampalia, 9,000; Anconia, 8,210; Persia, 8,000, and a great many others of 5,000 tons and upward.

The Mediterranean is likely to remain the graveyard for the majority of the ships sent to the bottom on its principal trade routes, mainly because of the vast depths of that landlocked sea. But there are parts of that body of water where a sandy bottom makes out from the shore for considerable distances and with a gentle slope. Here it is not improbable that salvage operations will be undertaken.

### Sunken Wealth After the War.

The natural query is, Why should not these international salvors turn their attention sooner or later to the recovery of sunken wealth carried to the sea bed by older if not ancient foundered craft? It is doubtful if the man in the street ever stops to think of the opportunities for fabulous gain presented by the ocean depths to thoroughly equipped, up to date salvors.

In 1893 the chief of the Hydrographic Office of the United States Navy announced in his annual report: "The most reliable statistics show an average annual loss of 2,172 vessels, with 12,000 lives, in the commerce of the world. The estimated value of the vessels and cargo lost (yearly) is about \$100,000,000." Picture the staggering accumulation of this wealth in the course of the past decades!

To go as far back as 1588, when Spain sent her Invincible Armada against England, we know that Lord Howard of Effingham defeated the enemy in the English Channel and that the surviving vessels took to flight, many of them being swept by stormy weather upon the western coast of Scotland and especially the rugged shores of Ireland, twenty-five of the Spanish ships having been wrecked on the Atlantic side of Ireland. It has always been persistently urged that many of these ill fated vessels were laden with gold and other treasure, and it is a matter of record that specie and plate of substantial value have been recovered from time to time since where these ships went down.

On the coast of Holland, near one of the entrances to the Zuider Zee, lie the

fragments of the hulk of the British frigate La Latone, lost on her way from Yarmouth to Hamburg in 1799. Gold and silver bullion worth hundreds of thousands of dollars have at various times been reclaimed from the wreck, and it is estimated that there is still left treasure to the value of substantially \$2,000,000.

At the battle of the Nile Nelson sank among others the enemy ship L'Orient. According to contemporaneous accounts, the vessel carried at the time of her loss large quantities of plate and jewelry, not to mention something like \$3,000,000 in specie. The French ship was carried to the bottom by reason of an explosion, and only indifferently equipped salvage outfits have tried since to reclaim the riches. The waters in the Bay of Aboukir, where L'Orient sank, are not over a hundred feet deep.

Another alluring point in the Mediterranean for treasure seekers is on the southwest coast of Greece, where the battle of Navarino was fought in 1827 between the Turkish and Egyptian fleets on one side and the allied naval strength of England, France and Russia on the other. From time to time the wrecks have been located in the pellucid depths of the bay, and according to documents in the possession of the defeated Egyptian Admiral, it was long ago established that millions of dollars worth of gold in bags and other riches were carried to the bottom in the destroyed craft.

### Treasure in Vigo Bay.

In 1782 Spain's richest argosy, a fleet of treasure laden galleons, left Cartagena, Porto Bello and Vera Cruz with a three years accumulation of bullion from the mines of Peru and Mexico. After escaping the buccannery of the West Indies and weathering the storms of the Atlantic the fleet was forced to battle by Admiral Sir George Rooke in Vigo Bay when nearly at the end of its long voyage.

The English and Dutch sailors fighting for Queen Anne won the day, and it is credibly reported that more than \$120,000,000 of gold and silver bars went to the bottom. Up to date and at various times treasure hunters have garnered from the sunken galleons something like a million and a half dollars worth of bullion. The most serious obstacles to further successes is the exposed nature of Vigo Bay.

To bring matters nearer home we have only to recall that the British frigate Hussar, which sank in the East River in 1782, carried down with her according to documentary evidence more than two and a half million dollars in gold. She struck a rock near the upper end of Randall's Island and history has it that she foundered about a hundred yards off shore.

Again \$10,000,000 worth of Spanish specie and bullion went to a watery grave off Delaware Bay when the DeBraak was lost. The Golden Gate, which sank off Hatteras in the '30s, was homeward bound from California with a great deal of gold aboard, and \$3,000,000 was carried to the seabed when the Montezuma was wrecked off Cape May many years ago.

### Only a Few of Hundreds.

These are only a few of the many hundreds of vessels that have been lost in our continental waters which, according to rumor and satisfying evidence, had aboard of them various quantities of treasure.

The conspicuous and significant fact in considering salvage or wrecking operations, either here or abroad, now or in the immediate future, is the physical possibilities of the diver. Thanks to the betterment of diving apparatus and the means now provided for safeguarding the underwater workers against the bodily stresses of deep submergence, a realm of activities has been opened up to him that was considered impenetrable but a comparatively short while back.

Once a ship is sunk her refloating or the recovery of any part of her cargo rests primarily upon the labors of the diver, and what the experts of our navy have done to protect the toiler in the deep gives promise of amazing achievements. Vast riches are within reach and their reclamation will depend mainly upon persistence, courage and the skilful use of technical agencies.